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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

HIGHER EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNERS

The hardest thing to give a student now is unhurried time with a difficult question. Answers arrive instantly, attention is competed for constantly, and almost nobody outside a classroom is asking anyone to sit with something confusing long enough to work it out. That pressure is not a generational failing and I do not treat it as one. It is a condition of the world my students live in, and it is sharpest for adult students who are fitting a course between a shift and a family. Independent thinking is not disappearing. It is becoming less practiced. Creating structured, protected occasions for people to slow down and do the intellectual work themselves is, in my opinion, the central job of teaching at this level.

HOW I TEACH

My classroom runs on an open communication floor. Seminar-style discussion is the primary mode of instruction, with direct lecture woven in when students need foundational knowledge before they can engage meaningfully with a problem. Students are not passive recipients of information, they are active participants in building understanding together, and in a room of adults that is not a nice idea so much as a practical necessity, since adults will not perform engagement they do not feel.

There is a principle underneath that structure.

> **True mastery of a subject means being able to explain it, defend it, and teach it to someone else.**

A student who can answer a multiple choice question but cannot explain their reasoning has not yet mastered the material. Every course I design is built backward from the outcomes students have to be able to demonstrate, sequenced through a deliberate learning progression, with scaffolding introduced early and reduced on a stated schedule as independence develops. I write the exit check before I write the content, which sounds procedural and is actually a discipline: it stops me from teaching what I find interesting instead of what the outcome requires.

TEACHING ADULTS

Adults are a harder room than teenagers. They arrive tired, they have heard a version of this before, and they will not tell you when you have lost them. They will simply start answering email. Designing for that means respecting their time visibly: saying at the start what the session will make them able to do, cutting anything that does not serve it, and never spending forty minutes on something a handout could have carried.

It also means treating what adult students already know as curriculum material rather than as a warm-up before the real content. A returning student who has managed a payroll understands more about economic decision-making than a chapter introduction can tell her, and a student who has raised three children has direct evidence about learning and development that belongs in the discussion. Aside from being respectful, this is efficient.

> **Instruction that starts from what the room already carries covers more ground than instruction that assumes an empty room.**

I have done this work in two settings: advising adult graduate students online through entire degree progressions, and designing and facilitating multi-hour professional learning for practicing teachers, which is the least forgiving audience I have ever taught.

SMALL SECTIONS AND LARGE LECTURES

A seminar of eighteen and a lecture hall of a hundred and twenty are not the same job in different clothes, and I do not teach them the same way. What does not change is the requirement that students do the intellectual work themselves rather than watch me do it. What changes is the machinery I use to make that happen, and in my opinion most of the complaints about large lecture courses come from instructors running small-room methods in a big room and then blaming the students when it does not take.

In a small section the discussion is the instruction. The open communication floor works exactly as designed, I hear from every student every week, and I can turn the session on its head in the moment when it becomes clear the room has misunderstood something. My job there is mostly to keep the conversation honest, to make sure the confident student is not doing the thinking for everyone else, and to notice the quiet student who is genuinely working versus the quiet student who has checked out. Those two look identical from the front of the room and they need opposite things from me.

A hundred and twenty people cannot be run as a conversation, and pretending otherwise wastes the hour. So the thinking gets built in smaller units inside the big room. I chunk the lecture and stop on purpose rather than when I run out of breath, I put a question to pairs so the argument happens between two people instead of in front of a hundred and nineteen, and I ask for something short and written so the thinking leaves a trace I can actually read. I also read a big stack for patterns before I

read it for individuals, since when the same misunderstanding turns up in eleven papers that is not eleven student problems, it is one instruction problem, and it is mine.

I will admit a preference for the small room. That being said, I am not remotely afraid of a large one. I spent ten years directing theater alongside teaching, which means I can hold a big house, project to the back of it, and feel the second the energy drops well before the faces show it. A lecture hall is a performance space with worse lighting. Treating it like one is not a gimmick, it is just an accurate read of what the room requires.

WHY FEEDBACK COMES BEFORE ACCOUNTABILITY

I state student learning outcomes plainly, I align every graded task to one of them, and my graded work is built around writing rather than multiple choice, since writing reveals how a student thinks and not only what they retained. Feedback on that work matters most at the beginning of a course, and it is most fair when it follows direct instruction. It is unreasonable to penalize a student for not meeting an expectation that has not yet been explicitly taught. Before students are held accountable for the structure, methodology, and sourcing standards of their writing, those things have to be taught clearly and practiced with feedback. Once direct instruction and guided practice have occurred, expectations can and should be held firmly, and at that point feedback shifts from instruction to accountability.

That sequence is not leniency and I would push back on anyone who read it that way.

> **The standard never moves. What moves is when the student is measured against it, which is after they have been given what they need to meet it rather than before.**

I am a firm believer that the alternative produces courses that are rigorous and quietly cruel, and those are not the same thing. Adult students in particular have usually met the cruel version already, and a surprising amount of what looks like disengagement in a college classroom is somebody protecting themselves from being graded on something nobody taught them.

STUDENTS WHO ARRIVE UNDERPREPARED

Much of the instruction I want to do exists to serve students who were not served well the first time. My master's thesis was on sheltered instruction for English Learners, and I have taught in a Title I charter and as a district-wide substitute across the full socioeconomic range of a large urban district, so I have taught the students who arrive underprepared and know it, and the ones who arrive underprepared and have been told their whole lives that it is a character flaw.

Those are different students and they need different things from a first week.

The standard does not shift, but the path to reach it is built with each student in mind. Lowering the outcome would be a kindness that costs the student the credential's value, and adult students in particular can tell immediately when a course has decided not to expect much of them. What actually

works is naming the standard early, breaking the distance to it into visible steps, and being extremely specific about what a strong piece of work looks like rather than assuming anyone has seen one.

WHAT I AM STILL WORKING OUT

Two things, honestly. The first is artificial intelligence. I have written publicly that I wish it did not exist and that students need to be taught to use it anyway, and I hold both of those at once. A mind that never has to wonder is losing practice at wondering, and I do not think an assignment that a model can complete unaided was ever assessing very much. I am still redesigning assessments around that rather than policing it, since prohibition has never once worked in the history of educational technology.

The second is the question my doctoral research exists to answer. I keep encountering students who received the same instruction, in the same room, from the same instructor, and produced wildly different results, and the comfortable explanations for that have never satisfied me. My dissertation is an applied mixed-methods study of exactly that problem. I mention it in a teaching statement on purpose, because I would rather be the instructor who is still investigating why her teaching works unevenly than the one who has stopped asking.